

METHOD OF WRITING
WORDS, MUSIC, AND PLAINSONG
BY MEANS OF DOTS

by
LOUIS BRAILLE

Translated from the French by Philip M. Kaufer

LOUIS BRAILLE CENTER
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

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Publisher's Note

Louis Braille completed the fundamental plan for his method of reading and writing by means of raised dots when he was fifteen years old. Five years later, in 1829, he published a small book entitled *Method of Writing Words, Music and Plainsong by Means of Dots for Use of the Blind and Arranged for Them*.

Over the years, Mr. Braille revised and refined his system. Among his changes was removal of the horizontal lines which comprised some of the signs in the 1829 version. Although lines are easy to read by touch, they are difficult to inscribe with a stylus.

In translating Mr. Braille's treatise, we have endeavored to retain the language and tone of his original writing as much as possible. The representations of some of the signs in the seventh series table (page seven) are indistinct on the original document and, therefore, are left blank in this translated edition. Regarding representation of sharps and flats in music notation (page ten), it should be noted that *d* is the first letter of *dièse*, the French word for sharp, and *b* is the first letter of *bémol*, the French word for flat. We are grateful to Maria Seo for her expert assistance in translating the music terminology.

The Louis Braille Center is pleased to make available this English translation of the little book which first set forth the reading and writing method that was to open doorways of communication and literacy for blind people throughout the world. We hope it will bring you an increased appreciation of the braille system, and of the master who so devotedly developed and perfected it.

METHOD OF WRITING
WORDS, MUSIC, AND PLAINSONG
BY MEANS OF DOTS

FOR USE OF THE BLIND
AND ARRANGED FOR THEM

BY
L. BRAILLE

Tutor at the Royal Institute
for Blind Youth

PARIS

1829

Preface

The ease with which one can learn and put into practice the ingenious method of writing by means of dots invented by M. Barbier especially for the blind would have been more than sufficient reason for us to refrain from publishing another method if we had not felt the need to have a system of writing in which the signs take up less space than those of the inventor, and in which there would be a big enough number of signs for representing all the characters used in ordinary writing and capable of being applied to the writing of music and plainsong.

In the method explained in this work we have intended to avoid the deficiencies mentioned and to gain the advantages which we are looking for: two of our signs take up exactly the same amount of space as one of the signs of M. Barbier, we have a sufficient number of signs for representing simple letters, accented letters, punctuation marks, numbers, and number signs, and finally we have applied this method to the writing of music and plainsong.

One will find at the end of this work a type of shorthand in which twenty signs are sufficient for writing all the words of the French language. Three of these signs occupy exactly the same amount of space as one of the signs of M. Barbier.

If we have pointed out the advantages of our method over that of the inventor, we should state in tribute to him that it is to his method that we owe the initial idea of our own method.

Dotted Writing for the Use of the Blind

This method is based on the knowledge of ten signs which result from the combination of two columns of dots, each one composed of one or two dots, lined up parallel to each other and placed vertically on the paper.

When we speak of the first column we mean the one that is placed to the left of the other column, and when we speak of the second column, we mean the one that is placed to the right of the first column.

One designates as the upper part of a column or of a sign the part of that column or sign which is the furthest away from the writer or the reader, and one designates as the lower part that which is the closest to the writer or the reader.

Each sign is essentially composed of two columns of dots or of the space for these columns. If in the explanation which we are about to give of each sign we sometimes do not mention a column or one part of a column, it is because that column or that part of a column which we do not make mention of should remain empty.

Here is the formation of the ten fundamental signs.¹

The first sign is represented by a dot placed in the upper part of the first column; the second, by a dot in each part of the first column; the third, by a dot in the upper part of each column; the fourth, by a dot in the upper part of the first column and a dot in each part of the second column; the fifth, by a dot in the upper part of the first column and another dot in the lower part of the second column; the sixth, by a dot in each part of the first column and by another dot in the upper part of the second column; the seventh, by a dot in each part of the first and of the second column; the eighth, by a dot in each part of the first column and another dot in the lower part of the second column; the ninth, by a dot in the lower part of the first column and another dot in the upper part of the second column; the tenth, by a dot in the lower part of the first column and another dot in each part of the second column. See the following table.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
•	⋮	••	••	•.	⋮	⋮	⋮	•.	⋮

¹ See another explanation of the ten fundamental signs at the end of this work.

In combining the signs of the aforementioned table with one dot, two dots, or a horizontal line, one obtains nine series of signs, each one composed of the ten fundamental signs to each of which one adds one of the three things mentioned.

Here is an explanation of the nine series.

The first series is composed of the ten fundamental signs; the second is distinguished by a dot placed below the lower part of the first column of each sign; the third, by a dot placed below the lower part of each column; the fourth, by a dot placed below the lower part of the second column. The signs of the fifth series each need a particular explanation; we will explain this series after the remaining four series. The sixth series is distinguished by a horizontal line placed below the lower part of each sign; the seventh, by a line placed above the upper part of each sign. One will note that in the first and in the third fundamental signs, which should enter into the composition of the first and the third signs of this series and of the following series, it is necessary to substitute for the first a sign formed by a dot in the lower part of the first column, and for the third, a sign formed by a dot in the lower part of each column. The eighth series is distinguished by a line placed between the two parts of each sign; the ninth, by a line placed below each sign of the fifth series.

The signs of the fifth series are based on a principle foreign to the rest of the method. Here is the formation of each of these signs.

The first sign is represented by a line placed in the upper part of each sign; the second, by a line placed in the upper part of the sign and a line in the lower part of the same sign; the third, by a line in the upper part of the sign and a dot in the lower part of the first column; the fourth, by a line in the upper part of the sign and a dot in the lower part of each column; the fifth, by a line in the upper part of the sign and a dot in the lower part of the second column; the sixth, by a dot in the upper part of the first column and a line in the lower part of the sign; the seventh, by a dot in the upper part of each column and a line in the lower part of the sign; the eighth, by a dot in the upper part of the second column and a line in the lower part of the sign; the ninth, by a dot in the upper part of the second column; the tenth by a dot in each part of the second column.²

Here is an explanation of the six supplementary signs. The first of these signs is distinguished by a dot underneath the first column; the second, by a dot underneath each column; the third, by a dot in each part of the second column and by a dot underneath the first column; the fourth, by a dot placed in each part of the second column and another dot underneath each column; the fifth, by a line in the upper part of the sign and a dot underneath the second column; the sixth, by a line in the upper part of the sign and a dot in each part of the second column.

² See another explanation of the signs of the fifth series at the end of this work.

The line which enters into the composition of the signs of the last five series can present certain difficulties to many of those who will study this method. We are going to show another way of representing the signs of these series.

The fourth supplementary sign has a property of raising four degrees the series in which is found the sign which is preceded by it; thus, if the fourth supplementary sign is found in front of the second sign of the third series, the second sign of that third series ought not to be considered as such because it becomes then the second sign of the seventh series.

We are going to offer a table of signs and letters in such a way that each letter will be found beneath the sign which ought to represent it.

See the adjoining table.

TABLE

The signs of the nine series, with the letters, the numbers, the signs of punctuation and the number signs which correspond to them.

First Series

•	••	•••	••••	•••••	••••••	•••••••	••••••••	•••••••••	••••••••••
a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j

Second Series

•	••	•••	••••	•••••	••••••	•••••••	••••••••	•••••••••	••••••••••
k	l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s	t

Third Series

••	•••	••••	•••••	••••••	•••••••	••••••••	•••••••••	••••••••••	•••••••••••
u	v	x	y	z	ç	é	à	è	ù

Fourth Series

•	••	•••	••••	•••••	••••••	•••••••	••••••••	•••••••••	••••••••••
â	ê	î	ô	û	ë	ï	ü	œ	w

Fifth Series

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0

Sixth Series

,	;	:	.	?	!	)	"	*	(

Seventh Series

+	-	×	÷	<	>	×	×	÷	÷

Eighth Series

=	+	-	×	÷	×	×	÷	÷	÷

Ninth Series

									
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Supplementary Signs

					
---	---	--	--	--	--

We have also applied this method to the writing of music by substituting for the letters and the characters employed in the system used at the Institute the signs which correspond to them in the first six series of the preceding table.

We have simply changed the manner of marking the values and the accidental notes.

The values, namely: whole-note, half-note, quarter-note, eighth-note, sixteenth-note, thirty-second note, and sixty-fourth note, are represented by the first seven signs of the seventh series, that is to say that the first sign of that series indicates whole-note; the second, half-note; and so forth.

The sharp is represented by the eighth sign of the seventh series, the flat by the ninth sign of the seventh series, and the natural by the tenth sign.

We have further simplified this process for the writing of less complicated music, such as plainsong.

The notes are represented by the ten signs of the first series of the preceding table, and by the ninth and tenth signs of the fifth series.

The values are marked in the following manner:³ whole-note is marked by a line placed above the sign which represents the note; dotted

³ Although in plainsong the values don't carry the same names as in ordinary music and although they do not correspond exactly, nevertheless we have availed ourselves of the terms used in ordinary music for these values. The values of plainsong are: *la Double Quarrée*, which corresponds to whole-note; *la Quarrée*, which corresponds to half-note; *la Longue*, which corresponds to dotted half-note or to dotted quarter-note; *la Brève sans que*, which corresponds to quarter-note, and *la Brève a que*, which corresponds to eighth-note.

whole-note, by a line between the two parts of the sign (for notes affected by one of these values one will make the substitution indicated for the first and the third sign of the seventh and eighth series, and in place of the eleventh sign one will place a dot in the lower part of the second column). Half-note is represented by the empty space which is found underneath the sign; dotted half-note, by a line beneath the sign; quarter-note, by a dot underneath the first column; dotted quarter-note, by a dot underneath each column; eighth-note, by a dot underneath the second column.

The clefs in plainsong are indicated in the following manner: C clef, by the fifth sign of the fifth series; F clef, by the sixth sign of the same series; G clef, by the seventh sign; and the A clef by the eighth sign of the same series.

The number of sharps or flats which should be in a key is indicated by one of the signs of the fifth series followed by either the letter *d* or *b*, depending on whether one wishes to indicate sharps or flats.

One indicates the alteration of a note in the following manner: the accidentally sharpened note is preceded by a sign formed by a dot placed in the lower part of the second of the two columns which form each sign. The flatted note is preceded by a sign formed by a dot placed in the lower part of each of the two columns which form the sign; and the naturalized note is preceded by a sign formed by a line placed in the lower part of the sign.

The repeat bar is indicated by the first supplementary sign, and D.S. (dal Segno) by the second supplementary sign.

One can see by all that we have said that the same sign can represent simultaneously a letter, a character of music, and a note of plainsong. To avoid the confusion which could result from the triple use of each sign one will see to it that words are preceded by the first sign of the ninth series, music by the second sign, and plainsong by the third sign of that same series. It will also be good to place at the beginning of each page the sign of that of the three things which is found there.

To read and to write according to the method which we have set forth are two things which require distinctly different procedures; for in marking dots on the paper, these will reappear on the opposite side, and if, for example, one writes two signs in such a way that one is situated to the right of the other, it will be necessary to turn over the paper to see what has been written. The sign which, while writing, was found to the right of the other therefore will be found to the left, and the first column of each sign, which originally was located to the left of the second column, will thus be found to the right of it.

In order to read from left to right, it will be necessary therefore to write from right to left, and so that the first column of each sign be located to the left of the second column while reading, it will be necessary to place it to the right of it while writing.

The gridded slate which we use for writing differs from that of M. Barbier only in that his has six concave lines on the surface, whereas ours has only three.

One places the slate in a horizontal direction in respect to the writer. One then introduces the paper between the slate and the grill which covers it in such a way that if the paper exceeds the width of the slate the excess paper will be located to the side of the writer.

The interior of each cell of the grill is able to contain one sign. The first column of a sign is marked by gliding the stylus against the right side of the cell, and the second column is marked by gliding the stylus against the left side of the same cell. The first sign is made in the cell which is the furthest to the right of the slate, the second sign is made in the cell which is to the left of the first, and the third, in the cell which is to the left of the second, and so forth.

When the stylus has thus passed through all the cells of the grill, the first line is finished. One then slides the paper toward the upper part of the grill so that the line which has been written will no longer be located between the slate and the grill, and one writes the second line in the way that the first was done; it is the same for all the other lines.

APPENDIX

Another Explanation of the Ten Fundamental Signs

If we represent by a the dot in the upper part of the first column, by b the dot in the lower part of the same column, by c the dot in the upper part of the second column, and by d the dot in the lower part of the same column, each sign will be formed as in the following table.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
a	ab	ac	acd	ad	abc	$abcd$	abd	bc	bcd

Another Explanation of the Signs of the Fifth Series

If we represent each of the dots which form a sign by one of the letters a, b, c, d , and if we indicate by f the line in the upper part of the sign, and by g the line in the lower part of the sign, each sign of the fifth series will be formed as in the following table.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
f	fg	fb	fbd	fd	ag	ccg	cg	c	cd

A Shorthand Method

The vowel sounds and the consonant sounds which form the words used in the French language can be represented by only twenty signs provided that one uses the same character to represent vowel sounds which are somewhat similar, as *u* and *ou*; and consonant sounds which differ little, such as *b* and *p*.

The letters which represent these vowel sounds and these consonant sounds are marked by the signs of the first and the fifth series.

See the following table.

TABLE

The signs of the first and of the fifth series with the letters which correspond to them in our system of shorthand.

•	⋮	••	••	••	••	••	••	••	••
a	é è	i	o	u ou	dn	in un	on	en	oi

—	=	—	—	—	—	—	—	•	⋮
b p	d t	g q	j ch	v f	z s	l	m	n gn	r

